

Parking: S.F.'s temporary problem

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The evening commute with traffic at 2nd and King streets in San Francisco, Ca., on Thursday Dec. 12, 2013. With the potential of the Golden State Warriors moving to a new arena along the Embarcadero and the increased construction in the Mission Bay neighborhood transportation in the area will become a problem with the increase of traffic. Photo: Michael Macor, The Chronicle



Services like City Car Share in San Francisco free up parking spaces. A host of new strategies and programs are helping to take cars off our streets. Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle



A self-driving two-seat prototype vehicle conceived and designed by Google is just an example of how transportation will change in the future. Google unveiled plans to build its own self-driving car that it hopes to begin testing in the coming months. "They won't have a steering wheel, accelerator pedal, or brake pedal... because they don't need them. Our software and sensors do all the work," Google's Chris Urmson said in a blog post. AFP PHOTO / HANDOUT / GOOGLE == RESTRICTED TO EDITORIAL USE / MANDATORY CREDIT: "AFP PHOTO HANDOUT / GOOGLE "/ NO MARKETING - NO ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS NO A LA CARTE SALES / DISTRIBUTED AS A SERVICE TO CLIENTS == HANDOUT/AFP/Getty Images Photo: Handout, AFP/Getty Images



Belman landscaping landscaper, Enrique Joseguera, performs landscaping work near a bulbout on Cesar Chavez Street on Monday, January 27, 2014 in San Francisco, Calif. Bulbouts and other strategies to clear parked cars from intersections for greater visibility for both drivers and pedestrians are popular. Planner parlance for such designs is "daylighting" intersections. Photo: Lea Suzuki, The Chronicle



A screen capture of the San Francisco Municipal Agency iPhone parking app SFpark in San Francisco, Calif. on Thursday, May 12, 2011. The \$20 million federally-funded project, a first of its kind in the world, will allow users to check real-time parking availability throughout San Francisco. Photo: Stephen Lam, Special To The Chronicle



Susan Harms feeds a meter on Filmore St. on January 04, 2012. San Francisco is collecting less money from parking fines and more money from the meters under San Francisco's innovative parking management program. Parking is priced according to availability. Drivers use an iPhone app to find empty parking spaces. Photo: Susana Bates, Special To The Chronicle



All buses and cars heading east were stopped on Market street. SFPD stopped traffic at the Market and 5th street intersection due to an altercation on the MUNI 9 bus line Monday, April 30, 2012. Photo: Sean Culligan, The Chronicle



Cars and vans are parked in metered spaces on Main Street in San Francisco, Calif. on Friday, June 28, 2013. The violation for parking at expired meters jumps to \$74 on July 1, making it the most expensive fine in the country. Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle



The Village at San Antonio Center in Mountain view, a green retail and residential plaza, features parking for car-share vehicles. Photo: Dan Evans

Believe it or not, parking may soon be a temporary problem. Just as the automobile made the never-ending problem of overflowing heaps of horse dung - there's a reason those historic New York brownstones have 20 stairs to get to the living quarters - we may be at a point where parking as a dividing issue may be a thing of the past. Consider the facts, add a little future visioning for good measure, and you will see a different world coming to us shortly.

The facts:

Youth have different driving habits: According to transit justice organization Transform of Oakland, young people are driving 23 percent less in the past nine years alone. The U.S. Department of Transportation data show that youth are getting their driver's licenses later and less - in 2011, barely half of 16-19 year olds were getting their license, and 20 percent of 20-24 years still didn't have a license.

Some of the reasons are hopefully temporary - young people cite the money for fuel, cars or insurance. Other reasons seem more permanent - youth like to keep their thumbs on their mobile devices, and they have grown up, and like, living in a virtual world.

People are riding public transit like never before. BART and Caltrain had record years; ridership was up 1 and 9.5 percent respectively at the beginning of this year. Even Muni ridership went up 4.16 percent from 2011 to 2013, higher than the national average. With more public transit ridership comes less need for a car. Fewer cars mean more parking.

Transit First is beginning to bear fruit. The Transit Effectiveness Project, which will make Muni more reliable and add more service, is finally being implemented. We have added a substantial number of bike lanes, and bike riders make up about 10 percent of daily Muni ridership, a great leap forward. If the tragic number of fatalities is any sign, we're even walking more, and we're working on Vision Zero to zero out pedestrian fatalities.

Businesses are beginning to realize the benefits of building housing close to work, or work near housing. The new Apple headquarters to be built in Cupertino includes housing for more than 13,000 people on campus. Salesforce has taken a long-term lease on over half of the [Transbay Terminal](#) to make it easy for its employees who live in San Francisco to get to work on bike or bus. All these solutions make the need for cars, and therefore parking, less.

SFPark's variable parking meter rates are working. SFPark started its variable parking meters in the spring of 2011 on Chestnut and Lombard streets and found that if the price of parking is increased when demand is higher and decreased when it is lower, parking is managed better. As we implement these findings in more parts of the city, we will reduce congestion and increase parking availability.

Car sharing and ride sharing are picking up. A shocking 95 percent of the time, a car is not being driven, but is parked. Nonprofit City Car Share estimates that with each City Car Share car used, up to 13 private cars are no longer used. That means that for every parking space taken up by a City Car Share vehicle, up to 12 parking spots are freed up. "Sometimes it's not about

the supply of parking," says [Brian Canepa](#) of transportation planning firm Nelson/Nygaard. "It's about the availability." If we free up 12 parking spaces with one car-share space, we've just increased our parking dramatically. Recently the [San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency](#) announced a pilot program where 900 parking spaces have been leased to three different companies: City Car Share, ZipCar, and local entrepreneur [Jessica Scorpio](#)'s ride-sharing company Getaround. If we were to make this pilot program permanent, we would gain 10,800 parking spaces, without a single change to our infrastructure. It's magic, only it isn't. It's just managing resources better.

Driverless taxis are coming. And we haven't even touched Lyft or Uber, the new private taxis that have taken off in San Francisco, further reducing the need for parking. Let's take them to the next logical step. What if they were driverless? Companies like Google understand the interest in looking at phones and tablets while commuting and are working on driverless cars. These driverless taxis could be called up, used to get from point A to point B and then passed to the next user, eliminating the use of parking almost entirely.

We are at a turning point. In the next few years, we could well see that parking is no longer the problem that it has been in the past. With a package of carrots and sticks and changing habits, we may soon be able to throw this debate into the trashcan of history. Want to bet?

<http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/Parking-S-F-s-temporary-problem-5534812.php>